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ABOUT SUZUKI is a series of publications dealing with the philosophy of early childhood education developed by Shinichi Suzuki. Beginning with the successful "mother tongue" approach to the teaching of violin and musicianship to very young children, his methodology has been expanded to include cello, viola, string ensemble, piano, and flute. The Suzuki emphasis on teaching the whole child in the way most natural to each child has gained worldwide acceptance. Suzuki teachers can be found in every corner of the globe, and educators have become increasingly interested in comparing the Suzuki approach to other pioneering trends in childhood education. "About Suzuki" publications make the exciting and thought-provoking concepts of this international forum equally accessible to educators, parents, students, and the general reader.

LINDA WICKES, author of "The Genius of Simplicity," is a graduate of Stephens College and the University of Oregon. As a violinist she is a member of the Eugene Symphony and the Oregon Bach Festival orchestra. As an educator she is an active member of the Suzuki Association of the Americas, American String Teachers' Association and the Oregon Music Teachers' Association, and she is a frequent university and institute lecturer. Ms. Wickes is also founder and director of Summer Strings Celebration, an annual workshop for string students of private teachers, ranging from three-year-old Suzuki students through advanced chamber music players.

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# INTRODUCTION

A COMBINATION of inspiration and irritation provoked me to write this book. The inspiration came from working with Suzuki method. As a teacher I felt the need for a positive, constructive approach, a method less arbitrary than I had been exposed to and yet with a solid structure, a well-built framework that would serve the student well. Once I “discovered” Suzuki method I felt a great sense of joy; at once challenged and yet comfortable, I sensed that I had finally “come home.”

The irritation came from skeptics who imply that Suzuki method is a shallow and simplistic gimmick. This book is an answer, a rebuttal, to that implication.

There is a universality of musical and psychological concepts and techniques that, fitted together, make up Suzuki’s method. Although some may consider it to be revolutionary, his method is based on ideas deeply rooted in the rich soil tilled by philosophers, educators, psychologists, and musicians, both performers and teachers. Great minds often run in the same paths, and some say there is nothing new under the sun. Suzuki, however, has correlated and integrated many seemingly ordinary, simple ideas into one creative and flexible method. The parts may not be new, but the synthesis is, and it is Suzuki’s genius to have brought these elements together.

The reader of this book will, then, hear from Plato and Piaget, Ginott and Galamian, Havas and Holt and Heifetz, and many others. I quote them from their own writings or interviews in their areas of specialization, and have selected passages which show the relationship of their thoughts to those of Suzuki. Very few of the authors were addressing

themselves specifically to Suzuki method, but each was expressing his independent thinking on matters which touch on or tie in to Suzuki's ideas.

Imagine yourself sitting in your own living room surrounded by this distinguished group. Enjoy the company.

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# 1 THE PHILOSOPHY OF SUZUKI

EVERY child can be educated by the 'Mother Tongue' method. It was forty years ago when this astonishing fact occurred to me," says Shinichi Suzuki. "Children everywhere in the world were speaking in their own language; moreover, they did this fluently, which required a very high level of proficiency.

"From that very day I started to study . . . and observe the practicability of the 'Mother Tongue' method.

"As a result I learned that the natural method of teaching a child its mother tongue is a marvelous educational process. It fills the child with enthusiasm. . . .

"Sometime later I tried to adapt this method to music education for young children. I accepted a number of children without first auditioning them, and began to teach them violin experimentally, convinced that every child would develop. The children did show great progress and enjoyed the process" [38].

Maria Montessori had also observed the learning process both she and Suzuki named the "mother tongue" method. In *The Absorbent Mind* she wrote, "The child has a mind able to absorb knowledge. He has the power to teach himself. A single observation is enough to prove this. The child grows up speaking his parent's tongue, yet to grownups the learning of a language is a very great intellectual achievement. No one teaches the child, yet he comes to use nouns, verbs and adjectives to perfection" [27].

Pointing out, as does Suzuki, that the child learns the language he is exposed to, she noted that "An Indian baby taken to America, and placed in the care of Americans, learns to speak English and not Hindi. So his language does not come from the mother, but it is the child who takes in the

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## 4 LEARNING BY LISTENING

**Y**OUNG children are natural mimics; Suzuki method takes advantage of their desire and ability to imitate. Suzuki asks that the child be exposed to music from birth, and that a limited number of compositions be played repeatedly so he recognizes them. Before violin lessons begin, the child will have started listening to the recording of the music he will eventually learn. Having recorded examples as teaching aids is not a new idea, but with Suzuki method a complete and logical sequence of the material beginning with the very first steps is available.

Psychologist Steven Keele writes that one component of skill learning is an accurate template of desired feedback. "... sometimes the template may be established prior to learning movements. This may be the procedure underlying the outstanding success of the Suzuki method of violin teaching. In the Suzuki method very young children are exposed to selected pieces of music, sometimes for months or years, prior to actually handling an instrument. Perhaps the detailed music templates that the children store in memory allow them to subsequently recognize errors in their own sound production and alter the sequencing of movements that lead to the sound" [19].

The process of rote teaching is easier if the student already has a clear mental image of the music to be learned. One could say that the child already knows the music and that the teacher only needs to teach the mechanics of how to play it. The recording also provides a model for the sound of a violin; just as a child needs a model of precise sounds for learning his own language, so he needs a model for the tone of a violin. "Sensitiveness to tone should be established early, and no amount of listening to poor tone, whether self-